

## Political animal awareness



**By Nate Smelle**

For most of my adult life, I have helped reinforce the idea that we humans are, as the Greek philosopher Aristotle labeled us, ?political animals.?

Not only have I made a point of educating myself about my role and options as a citizen within a democratic society, I have obsessed over the statistics and trends arising before, during, and after each election since I first began paying attention to politics in 1999.

Since 2018, Ontarians have had the opportunity to participate in five elections - two federal, two provincial, and one municipal. With the recent announcement of municipal candidates on Friday, Aug. 19, we now find ourselves amid the sixth electoral cycle in a little more than four years.

As we all know far too well, in this time, our community, as well as all of society, have endured the fear, uncertainty and inconvenience spawned by the COVID-19 pandemic. As catastrophic as this global health emergency has been, it has forced us to collectively open our eyes to the strengths and weaknesses of our governments on all levels, both across Canada and around the world.

As a result of decades of underfunding of our health-care system by one government after another, the arrival of the pandemic has shown us that our health has not been a top priority for those we elected. Likewise, the devastating death toll and case count in privately owned long-term care facilities where there were, and in some cases still are four people sharing a single room, revealed to us that in times of crisis the quality of life of our Elders matters less than the ?right? to turn a profit. In turn, we have, or at least should have learned from our firsthand experience of this crisis, that there is no room for profit, or cutting corners when it comes to our health.

Yet another enlightening byproduct of the pandemic has been our awakening to how our governments function. An excellent example of this came to light courtesy of the dedicated civic engagement of the Citizens For A Safe And Humane Hastings Highlands. During the grassroots coalition's campaign to protect public safety and the welfare of exotic animals, they put pressure on council to adopt an Exotic Animal Bylaw, by orchestrating a letter writing initiative addressed to the municipality.

Tragically, the letter campaign initiated by this group did fail to save the life of one of the tigers that was eaten alive by the lions at the formerly proposed roadside zoo in Hastings Highlands. The initiative was a success, however, in that it eventually compelled

council to pass the municipality's now active Exotic Animal Bylaw. Equally, if not more important, is how this coalition of citizens' efforts proved to us that when we raise our voices together, we can bring about the changes we need to see in the world.

Heading into this municipal election, we must employ our newfound awareness of governmental workings when we cast our ballots. More than ever it has become clear that it is not in our best interest to settle for choosing candidates committed to kicking the can forward, for the next generation to deal with. We know where this line of inaction gets us, and we cannot afford to neglect our values when go to the polls.

When we settle for the lesser of two or more evils, we are silently affirming our belief that the evil of two 'lessers' electoral philosophy is the best we can do.

Unlike with provincial and federal elections, municipal elections give us an opportunity to look beyond party lines at the issues that matter to us most. While Bancroft This Week and The Bancroft Times plans to cover the 2022 municipal election, each and every one of us can benefit from engaging with one another on the issues facing our community and the world we live in.

From this moment until all the ballots have been cast on Oct. 24 each of the candidates on the the ticket will be knocking on doors, making phone calls, and reaching out to potential voters in virtually every way possible. Keeping in mind that the overwhelming majority of our readers are also potential constituents, I invite each of the candidates, and the entire electorate for that matter, to start their own letter writing campaign. If you are one of the dozens of names on the official lists of candidates that came out last Friday, here is your chance to let us know what kind of 'political animal' you are, and what issues motivated you to throw your hat in the ring.